

THE SENTINEL



OFFICIAL SAFETY NEWSLETTER OF CIVIL AIR PATROL

HQ CAP Chief of Safety, Gary K. Woodsmall – Oct 02 Edition

E-mail: gwoodsmall@capnhq.gov

Phone: 334-953-5352

In Retrospect: We just finished a disappointing year of aircraft accidents; ten in all, with six fatalities. Five of these people were CAP members and one was a customer being supported on a counterdrug mission. This is now a time for reflection and introspection. We need to identify opportunities for improvement at both the individual pilot level and at the organizational level.

At the national level, we have assembled a team comprised of CAP volunteers, Air Force members and corporate employees dedicated to improving our operational safety performance. I'll be reporting more on this group's plan of action in a later edition. Brigadier General Bowling also announced his "Sights on Safety" program that challenges wings and squadrons to develop innovative mishap prevention programs that will compete for financial reward. One final initiative that should positively impact the safety of CAP operations is the new flight training section at the national headquarters. Look for many internet-based flight training programs that will target opportunities to improve the quality of our flight operations. One common thread that I've identified in our flight accidents is deficiency in airmanship. I'd like to redefine airmanship in CAP and make it our theme this year in our flight safety improvement efforts.

Redefining Airmanship in CAP: First, I'd like to credit Tony Kern, retired USAF Major, who wrote a book titled *Redefining Airmanship*. Major Kern is also the author of the book *Darker Shades of Blue: The Rogue Pilot*. Both are outstanding books that should be required reading for all CAP pilots.

Airmanship is the essence of a professional pilot. It's not awarded after a training program or a successful checkride. A pilot personally builds it over time. It requires honest and accurate self-assessment and a dedication to reinforce areas found to be deficient. Airmanship requires a solid foundation of three characteristics – one could call them core values of the professional pilot. Let's examine each of them.

The first is uncompromised discipline. General George Patton once said, "There is only one kind of discipline – perfect discipline". There should be zero tolerance for flight discipline violations – both personally and organizationally. This is because flight discipline violations are contagious and insidiously degrade good judgment. I've heard it said that one rogue pilot can destroy an entire flying organization if left unchecked. The more violations that the pilot gets away with, the more severe and overt the violations become. Other less experienced pilots see the actions go unchecked and start to believe that the breaches in discipline are the accepted way operations are conducted. The result is more incidents and accidents. Everyone has a moral obligation to report crewmembers with flight discipline problems and once reported, commanders have an obligation to deal effectively with the violators. It's important for commanders to remember

that the misbehavior should be punished – not the result of the misbehavior. In other words, don't wait until there is an accident to punish problem pilots. I personally find it motivating that most regulatory guidance in the Pilot's Operating Handbook (POH), especially notes, cautions and warnings, originated from actions that damaged equipment, caused serious injury or killed someone.

The second foundation of airmanship is skill. Pilots operate at many skill levels and it's not always low skill pilots that have accidents. A pilot deficient in any element of airmanship can be involved in an accident. A holistic look at pilot skill would have four levels of accomplishment:

- Level 1, Safety – This is a skill level reached by most pilots, usually following a formal training program or initial qualification.
- Level 2, Effectiveness – Normally occurs after a period of operational experience with a particular mission or aircraft. Most pilots are operating at this level after a successful “mission check”. Pilots at this level routinely accomplish their missions in an effective, safe manner. Most pilots feel comfortable at this skill level and airmanship paralysis usually occurs here.
- Level 3, Efficiency – Pilots operating at this skill level develop techniques that allow mission accomplishment with fewer resources. This higher skill level routinely saves time and money. Taken too far, however, this skill level can compromise the first two.
- Level 4, Precision – The Nirvana of pilot skill. Pilots here have refined self-assessment skills and are motivated in continuous improvement. Never satisfied with a prescribed standard of tolerances, this pilot continually strives for perfection.

Skill alone does not make a professional pilot. The other foundations of airmanship must accompany it.

This brings us to the last component of airmanship – proficiency. Flying aircraft is not like riding a bike. If you're not proficient, you're likely to get hurt! Once again, the burden falls on each individual pilot to monitor proficiency. The organization can mandate currency, but only the pilot knows if he or she is proficient. Proficiency has many detractors. Our lives get busier and more hectic every day. Many excuses are available for not flying on a frequent basis. Frequency, however, is not the only variable in proficiency. How long has it been since you practiced a simulated forced landing, a go-around, unusual attitude and stall recoveries? None are mandated, but all are important to a pilot's proficiency. Other factors that hamper proficiency are the normal effects of aging; decreases in reaction time, coordination and cognitive skills. Flying on a regular basis helps to minimize the effects of these natural decreases in performance. One beneficial by-product of proficiency is confidence, an important trait for any pilot.

As we prepare for challenging Homeland Security missions, it is imperative that our customers see us as professionals committed to safe mission accomplishment. We can do this – we must do this!

We need to focus on discipline, skill and proficiency – the foundation of airmanship